WHO STOLE NEW YEAR'S EVE?

THE CHICKADEE COURT MYSTERIES

#1 Who is Stealing the 12 Days of Christmas?

#2 Who Stole Halloween?

#3 Who Stole Uncle Sam?

#4 Who Stole Grandma's
Million-dollar Pumpkin Pie?

WHO STOLE NEW YEAR'S EVE?

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CHICKADEE COURT MYSTERY #5



Holiday House / New York

This book was inspired by biofuel research at the Pennsylvania State University and elsewhere, by the boom in hydraulic fracturing for natural gas extraction in Pennsylvania, and by the annual First Night celebration in State College. While there may be similarities in the chemicals used for fracking and those used in the development of biofuels, most of the chemistry in this book is fictional.

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For librarian Becky Collins,
who told me her students feel
left out on New Year's Eve.

CHAPTER ONE



The first time I ever saw Eve Henry, I was holding a chocolate cream pie.

Her family had just moved into the house down the street. I rang the doorbell, Eve answered, and her face lit up. I wanted to believe the smile was on account of my good looks. But it was probably on account of the pie.

"Hello, I'm Alex Parakeet," I said. "I'm in sixth grade. My mom and dad sent the pie and me over to welcome your family to the neighborhood."

That speech might not sound like much, but I had practiced it twice so I wouldn't mess up.

"Oh, wow, thanks." Eve took the pie. "I'm Eve Henry. I'm from California, and I'm in seventh grade. Do you want to come in and meet my mom?"

I didn't know how to tell Eve no, so I sort of said, "Unhhh," and then Eve explained that it was only she and her mom at home. Her dad was at work. He was a new professor at the college, and he was busy setting up his lab.

Actually, I already knew Eve's dad was a professor.

The people on my street, Chickadee Court, had found out a couple of weeks ago that new neighbors were moving into the Dagostinos' old house, and it didn't take long for the details to spread: They were from California, and Eve was an only child; her mom had grown up in Belleburg, Pennsylvania, which is over the mountain from us here in College Springs.

Besides being a professor, Eve's dad supposedly had some big scientific idea that might change the world. The college was paying him a lot of money and building a big, expensive lab for his research.

What was his big idea? That remained a mystery.

"Please come in, Alex," Eve said. "I don't know any kids yet, and I'm sick of unpacking boxes." With that, Eve turned and went back inside, leaving the front door open. What could I do? I went in.

I have been in the Dagostinos' house plenty of times, but now it looked strange. There were boxes everywhere and different furniture. In the kitchen, a lady who had to be Mrs. Henry was kneeling on the floor, cleaning out a cupboard. "Who was at the door, sweetie?" she asked without looking around.

"Alex, uh…what's your last name again?" Eve asked.

"Parakeet," I said. "Alex Parakeet."

Mrs. Henry sat up—"Oh, dear, so sorry. I didn't

see you!"—and got to her feet. Like her daughter, she had straight white teeth and blond hair, the way you'd expect on somebody from California.

"A Parakeet on Chickadee Court?" Mrs. Henry said. "That should be easy to remember." She wiped her hand on her jeans, then held it out. "I'm Jessica Henry."

"It's nice to meet you, Mrs. Henry," I said.

Mrs. Henry noticed the pie and fussed about how nice I was to bring it over.

"My dad made it," I explained. "Making pies is his job now."

"And I think it's your dad who put up the five gold rings for us, too." Mrs. Henry was talking about the Christmas display. Every year the people on our street decorate their houses to go with the "Twelve Days of Christmas" song. We're the seventh house, so we're seven swans a-swimming. Two houses over, the Henrys are five gold rings—and last week my dad, along with some other neighbors, put up the spray-painted Hula-Hoops so they wouldn't have to.

"My dad helped," I said. And then, I think because I was a little uncomfortable, I kept right on talking. I explained how my mom was a police detective, the only one in College Springs, and how my dad didn't have a paying job for a long time

because he had been taking care of me and the house, but this fall he started a pie baking business.

For me, this was already a lot of talking, but Mrs. Henry smiled and nodded so much that I also told her about some of the neighbors, like the Jensens, who host the annual holiday party; and Bub, who lives in a small house and makes good soup and bad coffee for anybody who stops by; and Sophie Sikora, who is a year younger than me and a loudmouth and some kind of electronics genius.

"I'm looking forward to meeting them all," Mrs. Henry said. "And the party is tonight, right?"

I nodded. "Pretty much everyone goes, too—except this year my mom can't. She's busy with work."

Eve's eyes widened. "You mean like she has to catch a *murderer*?"

I smiled. "Nothing like that. Somebody's been phoning in tips to the police department, and she has to investigate."

Eve's mom said she'd always heard College Springs was pretty safe.

I said, "Most of the time it is," but I was thinking how actually a few bad things do happen—like last summer when my baseball coach got temporarily kidnapped. But before I could explain that, I heard *Arf! Arf! Arf!,* then toenails scrabbling against

wood. Next thing you know, a white dust-mop of a dog bounded in from the hallway, pop-eyed and panting.

Eve still had the pie in her hands, which turned out to be unfortunate because right away the dust mop forgot his fear, homed in on it, and sprang. Quick on her feet, Eve dodged so that the dog missed, but then she stumbled against the open cupboard door and the dog sprang again—bull's-eye!

Mayday! Mayday! The pie was goin' down. En route, it did a slo-mo 360, but—amazingly—I managed to snag the edge of the pan. For a second I thought I'd saved the day, then—oh, heartbreak—the pie broke free and crash-landed—*splat*. The pan was still in my hand, but what had been dessert was now crust and goo—tasty crust and goo, I guess, because the dust-mop dog was all over it, not to mention that it was all over him, a chocolate-and-pie-crust mud bath.

"*Bad dog! Bad!*" Mrs. Henry scolded.

"Get away from there, pup." Eve knelt and shoved him back. "Chocolate's bad for you!"

Arf! Arf! Arf! the little guy argued, which meant *How can something be bad if it tastes good?*

After that, there was a flurry of cleanup activity—the dog, the floor, the pie's remains—and I figured my job was to stay out of the way.

"I never saw that kind of dog before," I said after Eve had finished wiping pie off his face. "What is he?"

"Mostly Maltese," Eve said. "They're very popular where I used to live in California. His name's Marshmallow."

"Hey, guy." I reached to scratch behind his ears; he licked my hand. "He likes me."

"He likes everybody," Eve said, "except—" From the hall doorway came a loud *mrrree-ow* that overlapped Eve's last word—"cats."

When we looked toward the sound we saw a very large orange feline who—I happen to know—is totally happy to terrorize dogs when he gets the chance.

Mrs. Henry spoke to the cat. "Where did you come from?"

And I said, "Sorry, uh…he's mine; I guess he followed me from home then sneaked in the door behind me." I crossed my arms over my chest and looked stern. "Way to go, Luau—scaring the new neighbor."

Luau ducked his nose and swished his tail, which meant, *Can I help it if he overreacted?*

Eve looked first at Luau then at me. "Uh… Alex? Are you talking to your cat?"

Oops. I tried to act casual. "Uh, sure," I said.

"Like everybody does. You know, 'Nice kitty,' 'Good kitty.' 'Fat kitty . . . .'"

Luau wiped a paw over his whiskers. *Fat?*

"I'd better take him home," I said, "before he causes any more trouble."

At the door, Eve thanked me for coming over. "Now I'll know one person at the party tonight, at least."

"I'll introduce you to Yasmeen, my best friend who happens to be a girl," I said. "Her family's eight maids a-milking, next door to my house. Maybe you've seen her?"

"The tall African American girl?" Eve asked.

I nodded. "Her family's from Trinidad. She's really smart. You guys're gonna get along great."